

STATUS OF WOMEN

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST INDIAN WOMEN—INTRODUCTION OF LEGISLATION

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs. It is some three months since the Prime Minister promised that removal of discrimination against Indian women would be a matter of urgent legislative priority.

Since three months have gone by and we have seen no sign of such a Bill I want to ask, first, when such a Bill will be tabled and second, is the matter of equality of Indian women on the agenda of the conference later this week between First Ministers and native leaders.

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the Hon. Member that the question of the legislation which she has mentioned is very much on the mind of the Government. It is a matter that undoubtedly will be related to the conference held later this week, following which we might be in a better position to indicate the progress or timing of that legislation.

REQUEST THAT GOVERNMENT ACT WITH URGENCY

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, in recent days this House has been seized, and rightly so, with inequities that exist in other parts of the country but this inequity, discrimination against Indian women, was created by an Act of this Parliament. If we have a right to speak to other Legislatures about what they should do, we should be getting on with cleaning up our own act. We have the right and the responsibility to do so. I should like to ask the Deputy Prime Minister why there is not more urgency attached to this drastic situation by the Government of Canada?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, there is urgency attached to this matter. The Hon. Member is not raising a matter that is not well known to the Government. It is true that the situation arises from legislative action previously taken by the Parliament of Canada and that that has to be corrected in order to reach the objective which she and we espouse. I want to tell her that there is urgency. She knows that there are quite a number of other Bills that have to be dealt with in the House, but that is not the reason why this matter is not going forward at the present time.

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AGRICULTURE

FARM FUEL SALES TAX

Mr. Laverne Lewycky (Dauphin-Swan River): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Minister of National Revenue. As he would be aware, farm women have not received the

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financial recognition that is due to them. Farm incomes have been so low that it is almost impossible to take advantage or recent changes to allow a salary for spouses on the farm and their opportunity to contribute to the Canada Pension Plan. If there were some attempt to increase the over-all farm income, however, such as taking off the sales tax on farm fuels, that would help considerably to increase small farm income. Would the Minister be prepared to support a rebate in the federal government sales tax so that farmers could have an increased income at this time?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of tax policy and the question should be directed to the Minister of Finance or the Minister of State (Finance). I am not responsible for amendments to the Excise Tax Act or the Income Tax Act. That comes under the Minister of Finance.

[English]

Mr. Lewycky: Mr. Speaker, I was not really talking about the excise tax; I was talking about the sales tax.

THRONE SPEECH PROPOSAL TO HELP FARMERS

Mr. Laverne Lewycky (Dauphin-Swan River): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is addressed to the Minister of Agriculture. I am sure he is aware that many farmers are on the verge of bankruptcy. Meanwhile, however, they have been contributing to the Western Grain Stabilization Plan. Just when the payments are most needed, the five-year pay out formula has triggered absolutely nothing. When can we expect to see the legislation which was promised in the Speech from the Throne? And will the Minister agree to make these changes retroactive to the calendar year 1983 in order to assist many farmers who are on the verge of bankruptcy at this particular time?

• (1510)

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say that the Hon. Member uses very loose terminology when he says there are many farmers facing bankruptcy. Does he mean 100? Does he mean 50? Does he mean thousands? Our figures show there are some farmers, but even we do not have accurate figures. However, we do have figures which show the farming industry in Canada, when compared to any other industry, is probably the best off of all. When the Hon. Member talks about the Western Grain Stabilization Act, he knows, and we have stated, that it is under review. The report is just about completed on how they can use the five commodities, how they can base the price so that perhaps there would be pay out on the individual commodities to those farmers. That report is not finalized at the present time.